Some of the New Fiction Themes Keep the Reader Guessing

Mystery in Varied Forms

England, New York and Tasmania the Backgrounds of These Books

FROM OUT THE VASTY DEEP. By Mrs. Belloc Lowndes. George H. Doran Company, New York.
BY ADVICE OF COUNSEL. By Arthur Train. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.
TIMBER WOLVES. By Bernard Cronin. The Macmillan Company, New York.

MYSTERY is the vital spark that keeps a large percentage of fiction alive to-day, as in the past. The cover jacket that hints of mystery is pretty sure to prove efficient in selling a considerable number of books. Fortunately for the author craft, the element of mystery seems to be as throbbing with vitality as radium. Nothing, apparently, can exhaust its combinations. It can be evolved from situations and environment outlandish or commonplace. In From Out the Vasty Deep Mrs. Belloc Lowndes has chosen rather conventional settings for a mystery story, but has refurbished her tale with modernized spiritualism—all but the Ouija board. A lonely country place, surrounded by a moat and in a bleak and dismal locality, sounds a little too true to the prescribed form of English mystery tales. Also there is the conventional haunted room and the guests who admit having all sorts of spooky feelings. The plot diverges from the commonplace, however, when Bubbles Dunster, just to put everybody a little more at ease, proposes a séance. Bubbles might have hailed from Greenwich Village, she is that full of life and modern ideas. Also, she has bobbed hair and gets her picture in the papers at least once a week. She proves to be a first class medium and makes nearly everybody uncomfortable by telling them of forms standing beside their chairs. She makes Lionel Varick especially uncomfortable. Lionel is a young widower, owner of the country place, whose wife left him considerable money. The dead wife had a friend, Julia Pigchalke, who was convinced that Mrs. Varick was murdered. Julia is still alive, but her "astral body" haunts Varick, and the irrepressible Bubbles glimpses that semi-ghostly personality.

The author's dependence on the supernatural weakens the structure of the story. Readers—and especially American readers—like mystery that is logical. It may be hair-stirring to the limit, but must have a materialistic explanation waiting in the final chapter. Such an explanation is not forthcoming in this book. Consequently the story is going to add nothing to the author's reputation.

The best mystery in the short stories comprising By Advice of Counsel, by Arthur Train, is to be found in "That Sort of a Woman." It is not a thrilling mystery as mysteries go. There is no bloodshed involved. It concerns a few words found on a separate sheet in an envelope inclosing a will. In the will young Payson Clifford is left his father's estate of $60,000, but the separate note says: "In case of my sudden death I wish my executor to give $25,000 to my dear friend Sadie Burch, of Hoboken, N. J." Young Clifford seeks the advice of counsel, and one of the Tutt partners tells him that the note should not be considered—that Sadie Burch will have no claim against the estate. But conscience bothers the young man. Then Mr. Tutt, the senior partner of this remarkable law firm, gets hold of him and shows him that his father's wishes should be carried out, law or no law. The hunt for Sadie Burch, and the explanation of the mysterious legacy, is all told in a masterly way. There are several other stories in the book which do not rank far below the one which has been mentioned. The senior Tutt is a remarkable character—a lawyer who finds intensely human ways of appealing to a jury and bringing a case to an unexpected ending. Through him the reader is told lots of things about the law—things which tend to lift the mystery from the profession and for which lawyers in general will hardly thank Mr. Train. The stories are all substantial in outline and are told with exceptional humor. There is a certain ripeness to Mr. Train's work which puts him far ahead of story tellers who specialize in flashier themes.

There are two mysteries in Timber Wolves, a story of the Tasmanian forest country by Bernard Cronin. One of the mysteries is: "Who was Peter Philip Barkley?" and the other is: "Who sawed the roots of the big gum tree that blew over and killed Jean Salter?" These mysteries are worked out in a new atmosphere that would be mightily appealing if the author had a little more knowledge of the craft of writing. As it is, the reader will get a lot of sidelights on Tasmania in the big timber cuttings. The "timber wolves" referred to are Bernard Frame and his gang of satellites, who seek to control the entire timber output of an enormous district. Jack Heritage, a young lawyer, is sent into the district to find the mysterious Barkley, who is heir to the huge estate of a former chum of early days of roving. Heritage gets into the timber fight and casts his lot with the independents opposing what is virtually a trust. There is no questioning the reality of the atmosphere. The descriptions of the logging scenes and of the rough men who do the heavy work in "a man's country" are evidently by one who knows. But the women in the story seem to be automatons, and when the author comes out of the big timber he becomes stilted and so highly conventionalized that much of the charm of the story is lost. But Pete Diamond, the "skin runner," and his kangaroo dog, and old Sollum and his partner, and Longin, the evil genius of the wasteland, are all worth reading about. Over the whole story hangs the spell of a vast, new land which has figured little in fiction but which seems to offer unlimited possibilities.

Bradford's History

Great Source Book on the Pilgrims in New Form

THE recognized final fountainhead, the source of all history on the Pilgrims and their settlement at Plymouth, is Governor William Bradford's book covering the years from 1608 to 1650. When Senator Hoar remarked that it is "the only authentic history of what we have a right to consider the most important political transaction that has ever taken place on the face of the earth," he did not overstate fact. As the years roll on since the discovery of the manuscript in the archives of Fulham Palace, the seat of the Bishop of London, and its presentation to the United States in July, 1897, the value of this narrative, written by one who saw and felt the significance of the migration, becomes steadily greater.

Bradford's history was written in a form that bordered on the medieval. This type of prose had charm for the student, for the scholar who caught its rhythm and was absorbed in the atmosphere of its period; but it was a difficult matter for the man out of the bounds of the proper cloister to read and catch the glow of the time and its spirit. It has remained for Harold Paget to render the Bradford History of the Plymouth Settlement (Dutton) in modern English. The result is a recast in a fresh mold, one that brings out in new and vivid bronze the salient human figures and the formative political events of the Pilgrim establishment in America. It seems to us that this book, so timely and so wholly worthy, should be placed in the hands of thousands of men, women and children all over the land. We need greatly a rebirth of the old heroisms, and the tongues of leadership must be those that spake and thundered centuries ago.

ANNE DOUGLAS SEDGWICK, author of Christmas Roses and Other Short Stories, published by Houghton Mifflin

The Age of the Reformation

Preserved Smith Emphasizes Social Aspects of Revolt Again Medieval Church

THE AGE OF THE REFORMATION. By Preserved Smith. Published by Henry Holt & Co.

"THE EXCUSE for writing another history of the Reformation," writes Dr. Smith, "is the need for putting that movement in its proper relations to the economic and intellectual revolutions of the sixteenth century." This is just what the author has done, and done extremely well. His interpretation of the Reformation is not exclusively theological and political; he perceives the intellectual and economic currents in the movement as well.

It is not accidental that the Reformation coincided with a very important, although gradual economic revolution: the transition from feudalism to capitalism. In the early part of the Middle Ages money was of comparatively slight importance. Payments were habitually made in cattle and other tangible objects. Industrial production was carried on by means of guilds, which enjoyed a monopoly of their respective trades. The members of these guilds were theoretically equal as soon as they had passed through certain fixed stages of apprenticeship. Great public works, such as the famous medieval cathedrals, were built by collective labor, rather than by the enterprise of individual capitalists.

Break-down of Medieval Economy

This crude and simple medieval economy soon began to break down before the demands of expanding trade and commerce. The need for capital, in the modern sense of the term, came to be felt. The discovery of America and the increasing trade with Asia increased the wealth of Europe and stimulated the growth of a class of merchant capitalists. The consolidation of France, Spain and England as national states and the substitution of a paid standing army for the former feudal levies increased the expenses of government and caused the rulers to resort to the expedient of government loans.

There were several points of contact between the new ideas in religion and the new economic system which gradually sprang up throughout Europe. Capitalism demanded individual initiative; Protestantism emphasized the rights of the individual conscience as against the corporate authority of the Church. The medieval Church was essentially otherworldly in its outlook; it emphasized the sanctity of poverty and fasting. The Reformers were inclined to preach the doctrine that industry and thrift are essentially religious qualities.

Eagerness to Seize Church Lands

Two other economic causes which contributed to the success of Protestantism may be mentioned. The nobles and princes throughout Europe were eager to seize upon the rich Church lands, and Germany was growing restive under the contributions demanded by Rome.

Of course, as Dr. Smith points out, it would be narrow and one sided to place a purely economic interpretation upon the Reformation; many other spiritual, intellectual and scientific factors must also be taken into account. There was a general desire for a simpler form of worship; the Renaissance hand helped to unsettle the implicit dogmatic faith of the Middle Ages. The discovery of printing was also a mighty aid to the Reformers. Wycliffe and Huss, the Albigenses and the Lollards failed to shake the power of the Church because they were unable to find any effective medium, except the spoken word, for the propagation of their doctrines. As a result of the new invention of printing the tracts of Luther and Calvin were assured an immediate and wide circulation.

Dr. Smith traces the progress of the Reformation in the various European states. He shows that it achieved practically all its conquests within the first fifty years of its existence. After that time the Dutch Republic was its only acquisition. The so-called Counter Reformation won back several countries for Catholicism.

Admires Luther

Discussing the personalities of the Reformers, Dr. Smith expresses admiration for Luther's courage and sincerity. He feels that these qualities more than compensate for the Reformer's habitual violence and occasional coarseness.

The author is less favorable in his judgment of Calvin. Describing his government in Geneva as a theocracy based upon espionage, he declares that "there was never such a busybody in a position of high authority before nor since." He also insists that Calvin possessed little originality of thought, although he concedes the austere logicality of the Institutes. He is much more sympathetic with the Calvinists than with Calvin. He feels that Calvinism made for the creation of an exalted type of character, often to be found among the French Huguenots and the English Puritans.

Dr. Smith sums up the various judgments, friendly and unfriendly, which have been pronounced upon the Reformation. He states his own conclusion in the last paragraph of the book:

"In summary, if the Reformation is judged with historical imagination, it does not appear to be primarily a reaction. That it should be such is both *a priori* improbable and unsupported by the facts. The Reformation does not give *our* answer to the many problems it was called upon to face; nevertheless, it gave the solution demanded and accepted by the time, and therefore historically the valid solution. With all its limitations, it was, fundamentally, a step forward and not the return to an earlier standpoint, either to that of primitive Christianity, as the Reformers themselves claimed, or to the dark ages, as has been latterly asserted."

An Eclectic Interpretation

Dr. Smith displays erudition and an excellent imaginative grasp of his subject. He is eclectic in his interpretation of the movement; he recognizes the fact that, like all great historical transformations, it represents a blending and compound of spiritual and material forces and motives. He is sympathetic with the Protestant viewpoint, and occasionally he seems to judge the Reformers a trifle less harshly than their adversaries. On the whole, however, his work maintains a high standard of fairness and impartiality. It certainly meets the most exacting tests of historical scholarship.

Strength in Barbellion's Diary

Last Work of the Author of the Journal Shows Insight

A LAST DIARY. By W. N. P. Barbellion. Published by George H. Doran Company.

THE dead returning to judge of their work in life and to form a philosophy of life's final moments could hardly write in more complete detachment, combined with more personal and poignant appeal than the dazzlingly stark pages of A Last Diary, by W. N. P. Barbellion, published by George H. Doran.

In this, the last work of that brilliant mind which produced The Journal of a Disappointed Man, appear the same caustic insight, the same disarming frankness, the same fundamental sympathy. But here the mind which has lived on grim terms with life and made no compromise with death stands aside and notes while it may, within the contracting circle of its horizon, the little things that fight for place with great problems while a terrible creeping death comes ever nearer.

"A self portrait in the nude" Barbellion calls his Journal. Then the Diary is a death mask.

Barbellion's identity, about which his early reviewers waged such a battle, is disclosed in the present volume by his brother in a long and appreciative but unsentimental introduction. Bruce Frederick Cummings, suffering from disseminated sclerosis, or creeping paralysis, watched death approaching for more than two years, his physical life slowly passing into a steady atrophy. In his early twenties, despite great disadvantages, he had become an assistant in zoölogy in the British Museum. His love of nature and active life made the horror of the shade all the more terribly real to him when this fatal and malignant disease took control of his outward life and reduced him to the necessity of turning inward still more intensely.

And so he came to write that remarkable Journal which some of his earlier reviewers elaborately identified as the work of H. G. Wells—confusing this twilight staccato minor and the moonlight nocturne into which it merges with the noonday symphonies of Mr. Wells's circus parade calliope. A common interest in biology was apparently enough to warrant hazarding a guess at identity.

Through the pages of the diary, this disconnected chronicle of a year of torment and close confinement, there runs a mordant humor which handles his personal problems roughly, and at the same time a tenderness more than personal is shot through the pages, revealing a nobly stoic sympathy for poor, bedeviled humanity.

At the end of the Journal he had written in anticipation: "Barbellion died on December 31." He lived, however, to cut the pages of his published journal with his own hands and to read the mixture of shocked amazement and open praise which greeted his confessions—work of such candor that a pen name was a necessity.

"There is no sort of unanimity as to any part of my complex character. One says a genius, another not. Witty—dull; vivacious—dismal; finicky—lewd; intolerably sad—happy; quiet humor—vivacious wit. One man said that I was a social climber, another that I was finicky on sexual matters (Ha; ha! Pardon my Homeric laughter), and still another that I shrank from life! Poor old reviewers. And friends and relatives say that I have not drawn my real self. But that's because I've taken my clothes off and they can't recognize me stark."

In his last year and a half which the diary mirrors Barbellion (he will always be called that) records with the same high courage of the Journal the fleeting impressions, memories, doubts, speculations which make up the triply vivid current of his living death. "I dread the day with my whole soul," he writes. "Each dawn is hopeless. They have not buried me deep enough. They have not even taken me down from the tree, and my wife they are just nailing up. . . . If I were to sum up my life in one word I should say suffocation."

"Some London neurologist has injected a serum into a woman's spine with beneficial results, and, as her disease is the same, they wish me to try it. . . ." he writes again in one of the most moving passages of the whole little book. "They little know what they ask of me. Whatever the widow may have expressed, I doubt not that Jesus received scant gratitude from the widow's son at Nain for his resurrection. And I have been dead these eighteen months. Death is sweet. All my past life is ashes, and the prospect of beginning anew leaves me cold. They can never understand what a typhoon I have come through, and just as I am crippling into port I have no mind to put to sea again. I am too tired to shoulder the burden of hope again. This chance, had it been earlier, might have been welcome. But in this present mood life seems more of a menace than ever death would. At the best it would be whinings and pinings and terrible regrets. And how could I endure to be watching her struggles, and if further misfortune came how could I meet her eyes?"

There is the same catholicity of taste, the same mingling of prejudices and keen vision familiar to the readers of the Journal. The dying man talks of the peculiarities of his nurses, of the League of Nations, of the Brontës, of literature, of life, of mating birds, of immortality, of voices in the street and of the preying thoughts within—all with the same poignancy. And here and there in the dark tangle of his closing agonized days there is the formulation of a philosophy hammered out on the anvil of bitter years.

"Men need each other badly in this world. The stars are crushing, but mankind in the mass is even above the stars—how far above Death may show, perhaps to our surprise," he affirms. "But if I go on I shall come round to the conviction that life is beer and skittles. Cheerio!"

Thus Barbellion—another of the indomitable young, affirming life in the presence of the most intolerable death!

Life and a Girl

Clever Satire on Modern New York

BEAUTY AND MARY BLAIR. By Ethel M. Kelley. Published by Houghton-Mifflin Company, Boston.

A REFRESHING book, punctuated with subtle satire, is Ethel M. Kelley's Beauty and Mary Blair, published by Houghton-Mifflin Company. It is as true in its modernity as the calendar for the month, as contemporary in its dialogue as chat of the day uttered from a faithful dictaphone. The girl, Mary Blair, the raconteur, has a father and a mother who are toying with hearts outside the home. Sister Stella and her husband, Cosgrove, who live in the Blair home, are bitten by a mild attack of Bolshevism. Young brother Bobby, in his way as mentally alert as Mary, is the kid youngster who, like other boys of the generation, knows more through report than he should.

Mary Blair, possessed of a shrewd mind and a radical tongue, examines life as she sees it lived around her, and frees herself of a running comment on men, women and sex that requires no concordance. It will be difficult to find in modern metropolitan fiction a more penetrating analysis of one side of city life, stated in terms of a young girl's brave speech.

One by one varying personalities come into contact with the girl. Her own household, in its lesson of dissolution, gives her an impulse toward abandon. Her own cool, native sense, a blessing to her young ignorance, warns and saves her. Finally comes Tony Cowles and the solution of all her troubles.

Terhune at His Best

Dog Plays an Important Part in Mystery Story

THE MAN IN THE DARK. By Albert Payson Terhune. Published by E. P. Dutton & Co.

THE MAN IN THE DARK, by Albert Payson Terhune, is full of adventure and conflict. There are moonshiners and a County Agent, night riders and a District Attorney, a lonely mountaineer and a girl, and, since Mr. Terhune is the author, a collie. In this story, however, the collie is not the hero, though he plays a very important part.

The story concerns the conflict between the moonshiners and the County Agent, who is trying to teach the mountaineers to substitute other crops for corn. As usual, the moonshiners get the worst of it in this story, though compensation is promised in the increased profits on the new crops. The identity of the leader is well hidden and only discovered after a number of exciting and dramatic happenings.

The Plays of Stephen Phillips

The collected plays of Stephen Phillips will be published on March 1 by the Macmillan Company. His has been called a "dazzling, meteoric literary success." His strange career was cut short by an early death in 1915.

Wholesome Stories

Sentiment and Humor in Anne Douglas Sedgwick's Latest

CHRISTMAS ROSES. By Anne Douglas Sedgwick. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company.

IT IS Anne Douglas Sedgwick's scheme to draw some likeness between the personalities in these short stories, Christmas Roses (Houghton Mifflin Company), and the grave or gay, shy or flaunting character of the denizens of an old-fashioned garden. Christmas Roses is the story of an old woman hardy enough to know the flowering of a new affection in her bleak wintry loneliness. Pansies is the story of a shy and humble little music teacher, who is obliterated by her florid and successful friend. Carnations are represented in the character of a charming and adroit older woman, who brings experience and wisdom to a young writer, restless in his marriage. Hepaticas is the story of a bereavement, and Autumn Crocuses that of pain bravely borne.

In that older fashion, whose stability she so greatly prefers to the reckless uncertainty of the new, the sentimental and the moral were not regarded as literary offenses. They are both present in wholesome quantities in these stories. In Christmas Roses a pampered young wife elopes with a poet, leaving her forgotten child to be cared for by her steadfast old greataunt. By her abstinence from censure the wise old woman hastens the inevitable disillusionment, though her success robs her of the child. In Carnations the romantic young author falls in love with a woman older than himself, and the story pivots on the shrewd appeal to his chivalry with which she returns him to his wife. Hepaticas tells how a young soldier brought his war bride, a chorus girl, to his mid-Victorian mother. But quite the best of the stories in the book is Pansies, which has no element of either the sentimental or the moral in it. It is a study of contrasting temperaments of two middle-aged women, whose diverging ways still meet at their school-girl friendship, and it is done with the insight, the delicacy and the humor which, at its best, the talent of Anne Douglas Sedgwick exhibits abundantly.